

RINGING AND MIGRATION AT NGULIA, TSAVO,

NOVEMBER 1980 - JANUARY 1981

G.C. Backhurst & D.J. Pearson

During 1980/81, Ngulia Lodge was manned on 40 nights over the main period of southward migration of Palaearctic passerines. On 20 of these nights, moonless conditions combined with mist resulted in large concentrations of birds around the lights. Coverage, and incidence of misty weather, were thus much as in 1979 but the Palaearctic ringing total was only slightly over half that of the previous season (Backhurst & Pearson 1980). This was due to two factors: firstly a full moon late in November coincided with the migration peak, and secondly, a limited number of experienced operators was present on most of those occasions when large falls did occur early in December.

No new Palaearctic species was caught during the season, although three migrants new to Ngulia at this time of year - Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*, Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* and White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* - were seen. This year was notable for the number and variety of nightjars caught, for the totals of Spotted Flycatcher, Nightingale and Basra Reed Warbler ringed, and for the number of Little Bitterns recorded. Totals of Palaearctic birds ringed at Ngulia during October - February are shown in Table 1 for 1980/81 and for the whole period of operations at the Lodge, 1969/81; scientific names are given in the table.

Coverage in November 1980 was complete from 2nd until 17th, when a growing moon intervened. Unfortunately, up to 12th, productive weather conditions occurred on only two nights. Mist with light showers on 7th, and then continuous mist from midnight to dawn on 8th, resulted in catches of 274 and 400 migrants respectively, in which Whitethroat was the main species although Spotted Flycatchers, Nightingales, Rufous Bush Chats, Eurasian Nightjars and Olive-tree Warblers featured prominently. The nights of 13-17 November were all productive to some extent, but with changeable weather conditions catches differed greatly from night to night. Thus, 733 birds on 14th after a dry night with continuous low mist, were followed by a mere 112 on 15th after the heaviest rain (c. 80 mm in 24 h, mostly at night) recorded at the Lodge for many years, and then 245 on 16th almost all arriving in mist and drizzle between 04:15 and 05:00 hrs. This mid November period produced a record daily catch of Nightingales (26 on 14th), good numbers of Eurasian Nightjars, including examples of the central Asian race *plumipes*, the first River Warblers of the season and a variety of shrikes, including an adult male Red-tailed with the characters of the central Asian race *speculigerus* (see Pearson 1979). The generally heavy rain was presumably responsible for unusual numbers of Eurasian Rollers and birds of prey in the Ngulia area during mid November. Over 1000 Rollers were counted passing south to the west of the ridge during less than 20 min in the afternoon of 14th. Two Eleonora's Falcons, three Sooty Falcons, 21 Eastern Red-footed Falcons *Falco amurensis* and a few Hobbies *F. subbuteo* were identified; in addition, some 20 more 'probable' Sooties were seen, and a group of 40 small falcons flying high up the valley in the mist on 16th were probably Eastern Red-footed. Lesser Spotted Eagles *Aquila pomarina* and Steppe Eagles *A. nipalensis* were both common, feeding on termites along the Park roads.

Over the period 30 November - 15 December mist, with or without rain, brought birds to the lights on all but three nights. The species composition of the early December catch, which totalled over 5000 Palaearctic birds, was typical of that normally found at this stage of the season, with less variety than in

Scopus 5: 28-30, March 1981

TABLE 1

Numbers of Palaearctic night migrants ringed at Ngulia Safari Lodge between October and February in the years 1969-1981

Species	1980/81	%*	1969/81
Little Bittern <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	1	-	3
Eurasian Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	41	202	203
Eurasian Roller <i>Coracias garrulus</i>	3	120	25
Eurasian Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i> (at night)	33	334	112
Golden Oriole <i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	2	200	11
Rufous Bush Chat <i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	126	191	667
Irania <i>Irania gutturalis</i>	106	90	1056
Sprosser <i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	1484	141	10 008
Nightingale <i>L. megarhynchos</i>	71	177	393
Rock Thrush <i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	15	174	85
Isabelline Wheatear <i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	10	157	61
Northern Wheatear <i>O. oenanthe</i>	11	157	67
Pied Wheatear <i>O. pleschanka</i>	5	148	32
Great Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	4	152	25
Basra Reed Warbler <i>A. griseldis</i>	93	224	427
Marsh Warbler <i>A. palustris</i>	2178	118	17 057
Sedge Warbler <i>A. schoenobaenus</i>	8	156	59
Reed Warbler <i>A. scirpaceus</i>	4	63	56
Upcher's Warbler <i>Hippolais languida</i>	9	37	207
Olive-tree Warbler <i>H. olivetorum</i>	46	182	251
Olivaceous Warbler <i>H. pallida</i>	44	144	291
River Warbler <i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>	215	106	1859
Willow Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	123	131	882
Garden Warbler <i>Sylvia borin</i>	17	38	383
Whitethroat <i>S. communis</i>	2246	138	15 411
Barred Warbler <i>S. nisoria</i>	25	51	421
Spotted Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa striata</i>	190	287	550
Tree Pipit <i>Anthus trivialis</i>	1	-	17
Red-backed Shrike <i>Lanius collurio</i>	85	114	685
Red-tailed Shrike <i>L. isabellinus</i>	52	84	554
Hybrid <i>collurio</i> × <i>isabellinus</i>	3	-	7
Total ringed	7251		51 937

*The 1980/81 total expressed as a percentage of the 1972/80 mean for each species

Totals of species ringed in previous seasons but not in 1980/81 are as follows: Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae* 1, Corncrake *Crex crex* 6, Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana* 1, Eurasian Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* 2, Lesser Cuckoo *C. poliocephalus* 1, Scops Owl *Otus scops* 1, Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* 5, Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* 1, Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* 2, Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* 1, Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* 1, Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* 1, Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* 45 and Yellow Wag-tail *Motacilla flava* 3.

mid November, and only very small numbers of Nightingales, Rufous Bush Chats and Eurasian Nightjars, for example. Basra Reed Warblers were prominent in the catch on most days. Little Bitterns were regularly heard at night, and on 7th, when several groups (including one of eight) had passed in the mist, a single bird of the nominate race was caught, whilst two others bounced from

nets. *Aquila* passage was much reduced during December, and falcons were hardly seen.

During the period 28 December - 3 January there was a marked absence of mist at night and consequently, few birds were attracted to the lights. However, the bush south of the Lodge was lush and provided a rich habitat for a number of warblers, some of which had been in the area for up to three weeks previously. Two Reed Warblers caught on the afternoon of 28th were both in active wing moult as were some of the retrapped Whitethroats. The small total of 146 migrants caught during the period comprised mostly Whitethroats and Marsh Warblers; the two late migrants, the Garden Warbler and Upcher's Warbler, were poorly represented while the Blackcap was not recorded at all.

Afrotropical region migrants occur at Ngulia in small numbers during the southward Palaearctic movement (Backhurst & Pearson 1977): Black and White Cuckoos *Clamator jacobinus*, Harlequin Quails *Coturnix delegorguei* and five species of nightjar formed the majority of the Afrotropical birds. Other species of interest were: a Green-backed Heron *Butorides striatus* at the end of December, a Dwarf Bittern *Ixobrychus sturmi* early in the month, several Button Quails *Turnix sylvatica* (December and January), a Black Cuckoo Shrike *Campephaga flava* in mid November, a juvenile Gambaga Flycatcher *Muscicapa gambagae* in early November, an African Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus* at the end of December and occasional Golden Pipits *Tmetothylacus tenellus* throughout.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Mr Bill Woodley, the Warden of Tsavo National Park (West), for allowing us to ring in the Park. The Lodge Manager, Mr Roger Chambers and his wife Jan gave us every assistance - we cannot thank them enough for all they did. We should also like to thank especially Mrs A.M. Forbes-Watson, Mrs D.E.G. Backhurst, Mrs J. Dirks and L. Bennon. Thanks are also due to J. Halliday, A.D. Lewis, P.L. & Mrs H.A. Britton, M.A.C. Coverdale, T. & Mrs D. Mathews, A.E. Butterworth, Mrs B. Couldrey, Mrs M. Gross and members of the EANHS who helped with operations on 6 and 7 December.

REFERENCES

- BACKHURST, G.C. & PEARSON, D.J. 1977. Ethiopian region birds attracted to the lights of Ngulia Safari Lodge, Kenya. *Scopus* 1: 98-103.
- _____ 1980. Southward migration at Ngulia, Tsavo, Kenya 1979/80. *Scopus* 4: 14-20.
- PEARSON, D.J. 1979. The races of the Red-tailed Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* occurring in East Africa. *Scopus* 3: 74-78.
- G.C. Backhurst, Box 24702, Nairobi and D.J. Pearson, Box 30197, Nairobi.

(Received 15 January 1981)



THE AFROTROPICAL REGION

The Ornithological Sub-Committee would like to mention that it has been swayed by the arguments of Benson et al. (1979) in *Ibis* 121: 518, and intends to use the term Afrotropical Region in place of Ethiopian Region. Ed.